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Facebook Use Comes at a Cost

About 2 billion people interact daily with Facebook. One wonders what effects do Facebook use have on the users' emotional well-being. In her article "Facebook Makes Us Sadder and Less Satisfied, Study Finds," author Elise Hu shares the results of a 2013 University of Michigan subjective well-being study on college-aged adults who use Facebook. The study, published in the journal *PLOS One*, found Facebook use may come at a psychological cost. Hu's article was originally published in www.NPR.org on August 20, 2013. The audience this article may appeal to is the over two billion Facebook users around the world. The article claims that Facebook use led to declines in moment-to-moment happiness and overall life satisfaction. Study researchers tested the variables of happiness and satisfaction in real time on 82 participants by text-messaging them five times a day for two weeks. The study authors suspect social comparison made their test subjects feel bummed. Hu acknowledged that these findings add data points in our quest to understand Facebook and other social media's effect on our emotional well-being. While I am convinced with Elise Hu's prescription of less Facebook to counter Facebook despair, the author relied less of ethos but more of her journalistic pathos and logos from the peer-reviewed study article.

Elise Hu earned her bachelor's degree in broadcast journalism from the University of Missouri School of Journalism. Hu began her career as a television reporter for several stations in Texas, and in 2009 she helped found The Texas Tribune. She joined NPR in 2011 and opened the Seoul bureau in early 2015. She hosted several video series on NPR. Her reporting and social media work had been honored by various press organizations. After nearly a decade at NPR, In April 2020, Elise joined TED Talks Daily podcast as its inaugural host.

In writing the article, Hu heavily used her journalistic experience in convincing an audience of an argument by creating an emotional response to a timely and provocative subject. Likewise, she also referenced and quoted numerous study findings to persuade an audience. In the following passages, I am analyzing this article from beginning to its end.

Elise Hu begins the article by voicing concern when she writes, "Facebook's mission 'to make the world more open and connected' is a familiar refrain among company leaders. But the latest research shows connecting 1.1 billion users around the world may come at a psychological cost" (Hu). In other words, Facebook use may come at a cost. According to the University of Michigan research study, "On the surface, Facebook provides an invaluable resource for fulfilling the basic human need for social connection. Rather than enhancing well-being, however, these findings suggest that Facebook may undermine it." (Kross et al). In making this comment, research lead author Ethan Kross believes that frequent Facebook use erodes its significance as a vital means of social interaction. Hu then quotes research co-author John Jonides, a University of Michigan cognitive neuroscientist, "With something like half a billion people who use Facebook every day, understanding the consequences of that use on our well-

being is of critical importance”. Basically, Jonides is warning that not understanding the consequences of Facebook use on our well-being will only make the problem worse.

To further support her main claim, Hu states “Researchers tested the variables of happiness and satisfaction in real time on 82 participants. The researchers text-messaged them five times a day for two weeks to examine how Facebook use influenced how they felt. Participants responded to questions about loneliness, anxiety and general emotional well-being”. In making this statement, Hu tries to provide research methodology and rationale. Hu then adds that “The study authors did not get at the reasons Facebook made their test subjects feel glum. But Jonides suspects it may have to do with social comparison. ‘When you're on a site like Facebook, you get lots of posts about what people are doing. That sets up social comparison — you maybe feel your life is not as full and rich as those people you see on Facebook,’ he says”. The essence of Jonides’ argument is that it is human nature to compare yourself with others.

Hu states “Interestingly, Jonides notes, the study found the effects of Facebook are most pronounced for those who socialize the most ‘in real life.’ He says the folks who did the most direct, face-to-face socializing and used social media were the ones who reported the most Facebook-related mood decline. ‘It suggests that when you are engaging in social interactions a lot, you're more aware of what others are doing and, consequently, you might be more sensitized about what's happening on Facebook and comparing that to your own life,’ Jonides says”. In a few words, Jonides believes that socially active people in both real life and in social platforms tend to compare themselves and feel gloomy.

Hu clarifies that “The researchers also tested and discounted other reasons for our unhappiness. ‘Researchers also found no evidence for two alternative possible explanations for

the finding that Facebook undermines happiness. People were not more likely to use Facebook when they felt bad. In addition, although people were more likely to use Facebook when they were lonely, loneliness and Facebook use both independently predicted how happy participants subsequently felt'. 'Thus, it was not the case that Facebook use served as a proxy for feeling bad or lonely,' says lead author Ethan Kross''. In presenting this argument, Hu tries to make clear that Facebook use alone is not the only cause to feel sad or lonely.

On the other side, Hu reached out to Facebook for a response, but got an automatic reply. Hu claims that "These findings, however, add data points in our quest to understand Facebook and other social media's effect on our emotional well-being, whether it's the behemoth social network's role after relationships end or our feelings of regret after pressing 'share'". In making this comment, Hu tries to present the narrative from the other party although unsuccessful. Nevertheless, she adds that the findings of this study are a plus point.

In concluding the article, Hu states "If you're feeling bummed, researchers did test for and find a solution. The prescription for Facebook despair is less Facebook. Researchers found that face-to-face or phone interaction - those outmoded, analog ways of communication - had the opposite effect. Direct interactions with other human beings led people to feel better". Elise Hu did enough to appeal to the audience's emotions and provided sufficient evidence to support her argument for the peer-reviewed study article.

Works Cited

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